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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 0407  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 2275  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1660  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE PRIORITY  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY  
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP PRIORITY  
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [SCUL](#) [KPAO](#) [KG](#)

SUBJECT: KYRGYZ STATE TV: LURING THE DINOSAUR TOWARD  
REFORMS

REF: A. BISHKEK 1737  
[B](#). BISHKEK 1742  
[C](#). BISHKEK 1752

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Sensitive but unclassified. Not for Internet distribution.

[1](#)1. (U) This is the fourth in a series of cables on the state of the media in Kyrgyzstan, with the final cable offering an overall analysis to follow.

[1](#)2. (SBU) SUMMARY: With access to the nearly every household in Kyrgyzstan, the State Television and Radio Company (KTR) is by far the dominant mass media outlet in the country, and it is the only television or radio outlet with national reach. Because of its wide coverage and influence, control of KTR has long been a contentious political issue, with critics complaining about KTR's pro-government editorial line. When he ran for president in July 2005, President Bakiyev promised he would transform the state TV and radio conglomerate into a public entity with an independent board. In October 2006, Bakiyev vetoed a bill that would have created such a board. Transforming KTR into "public television" was a key opposition demand during the anti-government demonstration in Bishkek in early November. Later in the month, Bakiyev signed a decree that established a supervisory board for KTR, but most of its members would be controlled by the Presidential Administration and the KTR director would continue to report to the president -- a move that satisfied none of the critics. KTR remains a bloated bureaucracy, and its management has shown no interest in reform. Nor is there any indication that the government is interested in reforming its voice and cash-cow. The demands for reform of KTR and creation of public television will continue. END SUMMARY.

MAMMOTH IN BOTH SIZE AND REACH  
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¶3. (SBU) Accurately dubbed the "dinosaur" of the Kyrgyz media due to its age and sheer size, the State Television and Radio Company (also known as KTR, GTRK and NTRK) is the successor to the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic Television Company established in 1958. Even after independence in 1991, control of the company has remained in the hands of the Presidential Administration, and little change has taken place since then. The head of KTR, along with his senior staff, are appointed directly by the president. KTR employs an army of over 450 journalists for TV programs and another 270 for radio.

¶4. (SBU) KTR is the only television network with nationwide reach; no other station comes close to matching its viewership. KTR's primetime news segment, shown each evening in Kyrgyz and Russian, currently claims to be the most-watched locally produced news program in the country. The main KTR channel airs locally produced programs, with the exception of a daily, one-hour Chinese show dubbed in Kyrgyz. Additionally, KTR rebroadcasts programming from Russia's ORT and RTR on the state TV's second and third channels through an undisclosed agreement some maintain is illegal. These state-run agencies out of Moscow provide the Putin administration with a direct line to the Kyrgyz population. Founded in 1995 as a subsidiary of KTR, Zamana Studio produces a three hour morning show in both Kyrgyz and Russian languages. The government, through the KTR director, determines the editorial policy of all Zamana programs.

#### A POWERFUL WEAPON IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ARSENAL

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¶5. (SBU) When President Bakiyev took office after the March 2005 "Tulip Revolution" and when he stood for election in

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July 2005, one of his promises was to transform the State Television and Radio Company into a public entity. This meant that KTR was to be operated by independent management, without influence of the president or other government officials. Opposition parties, citing abuses during the Akayev era, argued that the transformation would reduce the influential powers of the government by eliminating the one-sided campaigns against certain members of parliament.

¶6. (SBU) USAID-funded Internews-Kyrgyzstan assisted in drafting a bill that would transform the aging company into a publicly controlled entity. While the bill was passed by parliament, President Bakiyev vetoed it in October 2006 and signed his own version the following month that created a supervisory board, as Internews had suggested, but without relinquishing control over most of the board members and the director of KTR. In the signed decree, the board is able to set editorial principles, oversee the company finances, set agendas for public hearings, request investigations into financial mishandlings, and investigate complaints against the company. The board will consist of five members appointed by the president, five by the parliament and an additional five staff of KTR, giving the President a de facto 2/3 majority. Under the new decree, the state TV director must follow the guidance of the board while continuing to answer directly to the president.

#### KTR RADIO: MAJOR COVERAGE BUT MINOR IMPACT

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¶7. (SBU) Although touting similar coverage as its television counterpart, KTR Radio attracts a mere fraction of the total amount of listeners in the Kyrgyz Republic. In contrast to KTR TV, the radio station faces stiff competition in the rural areas, with the majority of listeners tuning in to Azattyk Radio (RFE/RL). KTR Radio news programs are also known to be pro-government, although not nearly as slanted as KTR TV.

COMMENT

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18. (SBU) All sides in the political debate have a stake in the future of KTR. During the November demonstrations, KTR only showed the pro-Bakiyev demonstration and heaped criticism on the anti-Bakiyev demonstration. Except for Chui Oblast, the entire country received only pro-presidential views during a critical time in Kyrgyzstan. KTR is a powerful tool, and this is reason enough for the presidential administration to oppose calls to relinquish control over the media giant. Bakiyev agreed to a supervisory board that allots two-thirds control to his administration, if State TV staff members must answer to their director. The end result is a puppet board, with the president firmly holding all of the strings. This will continue to be a tense issue with the opposition and civil society, and a symbol of the extent, or limits, of independent media in Kyrgyzstan.  
YOVANOVITCH